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FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA PRIORITY 0114

RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA PRIORITY 7890

RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 1113

RUEHN/AMEMBASSY OSLO PRIORITY 3799

RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY 5787

RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL PRIORITY 3522

RUEHROV/AMEMBASSY VATICAN PRIORITY 0639

RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON PRIORITY 3765

RUEHDIR/IRAN RPO DUBAI PRIORITY 0010

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 STATE 080300

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SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [IR](#) [PHUM](#) [EUN](#)

SUBJECT: DEMARCHE: MISSING/DETAINED AMCITS IN IRAN

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: The Department asks that addressee posts raise the issue of missing and detained American citizens in Iran with their host governments and request that host government contacts reach out to their Iranian interlocutors regarding the speedy return of these individuals to their families. Note that only one AmCit is currently missing in Iran, Mr. Robert Levinson. The other four individuals - Haleh Esfandiari, Kian Tajbakhsh, Parnaz Azima, and Ali Shakeri - have been prevented from leaving Iran - and in some cases imprisoned - by the Iranian government, which has also publicly charged several of these individuals with threatening Iran's national security. Together, these cases represent a disturbing pattern of harassment of innocent Americans in Iran. END SUMMARY.

OBJECTIVES

12. Begin Objectives.

-- Request that host government officials convey our concern about the recent pattern of AmCit harassment in Iran to their Iranian interlocutors.

-- Use background information provided below to outline specific cases of concern, as appropriate.

-- Emphasize the high level of USG interest in each of these cases, as evidenced by the June 1 Statement by the President on the Detention of American Citizens by the Iranian Regime (available at www.whitehouse.gov).

-- Stress that we believe it is within the power of the Iranian government to assist in returning these individuals to their families.

End Objectives.

BACKGROUND

13. Begin Background.

(U) Dr. Haleh Esfandiari is the Director of the Middle East Program at the Woodrow Wilson International Center in Washington. While visiting her 93-year-old mother in Tehran in December 2006, her passports were stolen at knife point. Four days later, she was summoned to the Ministry of Intelligence to begin a six-week series of interrogations

focusing on the Middle East Program at the Wilson Center. Repeatedly during the interrogations, Dr. Esfandiari was pressured to make "confessions" or to implicate the Wilson Center in activities in which it had no part, which she refused to do. The interrogations ended February 14, and she heard nothing from her interrogators until early May, when she was again summoned to the Ministry of Intelligence. Upon her arrival on May 8, Esfandiari was arrested and taken to Evin Prison where she remains. On May 29, a judiciary spokesman charged Dr. Esfandiari, along with Kian Tajbakhsh and Parnaz Azima (see below), with endangering Iran's national security and espionage.

(U) Kian Tajbakhsh is an Iranian-American social scientist and urban planner who works as a consultant for the Open Society Institute. He has worked as a consultant in the areas of local government reform, urban planning and social policy, and has taught at universities in the United States and Iran. On/around May 11, while Tajbakhsh was visiting Iran on personal travel, Iranian authorities arrested and imprisoned him. An Iranian judiciary spokesperson later announced on May 29 that Tajbakhsh, along with Haleh Esfandiari and Parnaz Azima, had been charged with endangering national security and espionage.

(U) Parnaz "Nazi" Azima is an Iranian-American journalist for Radio Farda based in Prague. Iranian officials confiscated her passports at the Tehran airport on January 25 as she was entering Iran to visit her mother. Azima has not been

STATE 00080300 002 OF 002

imprisoned to date, but she has tried unsuccessfully to retrieve her passports from Iranian authorities on several occasions. She was summoned to appear at the Revolutionary Court on May 15, where the judge interrogated her for four hours, accused her of antiregime propaganda and ordered her to pay a bond of 800,000,000 Iranian Rials. Later, on May 29, a judiciary spokesman also identified Azima, together with Esfandiari and Tajbakhsh as a spy charged with endangering national security and espionage. Azima's lawyer denies that she was ever charged with these crimes. She remains out of prison at her mother's house in Tehran, but is unable to leave Iran.

(U) Ali Shakeri works as a mortgage broker and peace activist in Irvine, California, and is a founding board member of the Center for Citizen Peacebuilding at the University of California at Irvine. He traveled to Iran in early May to visit his sick mother (NOTE: Shakeri's mother has since died) and was arrested by Iranian authorities on/around May 8. The semiofficial Iranian Student News Agency (ISNA) confirmed on June 8 that Shakeri was being held on security-related charges and investigated by the security department of the Tehran prosecutor's office.

(U) Robert A. Levinson is a retired FBI Special Agent who traveled to Kish Island, Iran on March 8 on personal travel. Reports indicate that he checked into the Maryam Hotel in Kish Island that day, and that two Iranian officials escorted him out of his hotel room for "questioning" later that evening. Mr. Levinson has not been seen or heard from since.

The USG has sent multiple "Swiss Note" message to Iran via the Swiss Protecting Power in Tehran inquiring as to his whereabouts, and Levinson's wife, Christine, has spoken directly with Iranian PermRep Zarif at the UN in New York, but so far the Iranian government has refused to acknowledge either his initial visit or his continued presence in Iran.

End Background.

POINT OF CONTACT

¶4. (SBU) The POC for these cases is Rob McInturff in the Office of Iranian Affairs (NEA/IR: 202-647-2520).

RICE